## Chapter Two

## The Terrorist Threat in Strategic Context

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### Introduction

This chapter presents a broad survey of the terrorism threat to United States citizens, property, and interests to capture the state of that threat early after the beginning of the millennium. Much has been written elsewhere on various aspects of and changes in terrorist motivations, tactics, weapons, and organizational schemes, and this chapter does not attempt to add volume to that literature. What it does is consolidate and systematize numerous lessons, particularly those drawn within the policy-oriented literature, into an overarching strategic context to allow for pointed analysis of the terrorist threat to United States national security.

The snapshot presented here is taken with a wide lens, establishing the threat within its strategic context. That context is key. Viewing the many pieces and parts of contemporary terrorism is valuable, and for such a complex phenomenon, much of the necessary detail can only be developed through specific and narrow development. But a full understanding of the threat requires that those detailed parts be viewed within a coherent whole—only then can the true nature and extent of the threat be seen. Further, the strategic context must be at the heart of any response strategy. You must comprehend the terrorist's strategy to counter it with yours.

This survey, then, proceeds by first establishing terrorism within its strategic context to allow comprehensive analysis. The essential components of terrorism are identified and developed in detail, and they are then related within a dynamic flow diagram suggested as a model framework for terrorism description and analysis. That framework can be applied to today's terrorists and their preferred targets to illustrate the range and variety of terrorist threats affecting US citizens, territory, and interests now and into the 21st century.

Finally, that strategic context and the perspective it provides are applied to suggest the broad outline of appropriate response strategies to enhance US national security.

## Strategic Context

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to seek to establish a universally accepted definition of terrorism. Indeed, the difficulties in trying to define the phenomena even within the Executive Branch of the United States government are legendary. However, discussions of what terrorism entails are useful in identifying essential elements to incorporate into examining the nature and extent of the threat.[1] Broadly stated, the "terrorism" of interest here is calculated violence applied toward coercive intimidation or provocation.[2] The "calculated violence" component points to a focus on the instrumental act—the bomb or the gun, the shooter, the victim, the violence. The "coercive intimidation or provocation" points to the ultimate objective—the creation of fear as leverage toward changing some aspect of government or society. Bruce Hoffman reminds us that the two central differentiating factors of the terrorist are his dedication to a political cause (thus marking him as distinct from a common criminal) and his instrumental reliance on violence (that differentiates him from other political extremists).[3] The central point is that terrorism cannot effectively be viewed as one or the other; it is not simply the act, nor is it simply the objective. Both perspectives are essential to fully understand, analyze, and respond to terrorism, and both are highlighted in our conceptualization of terrorism.

Our focus in this chapter is specifically on political terrorism—a strategy of violence within a broader political context. This deemphasizes the violent act of the single criminal or deranged individual acting toward personal ends, and it marginalizes the occasional use of indiscriminate violence as a tactic within a wider revolutionary campaign. We choose to focus on political terrorism not because it is the only source of threat, but because it is the most complex manifestation of terrorism, thus incorporating all of the components that we want to identify and develop in overviewing the full range of threat.

The terrorism of focus here forms the strategy, the central manifestation of the political violence, and the vehicle designed to reach the political end.[4] This terrorism is the "systematic political terrorism"[5] that the world has seen in changing forms since the 1970s. Systematic terrorism aims toward a strategic end, and it both can and must be viewed as the political strategy that it is. In a classic statement, David Fromkin presents a comprehensive characterization of the strategy of terrorism.

> All too little understood, the uniqueness of the strategy lies in this: that it achieves its goal not through its acts but through the response to its acts. In any other such strategy, the violence is the beginning and its consequences are the end of it. For terrorism, however, the consequences of the violence are themselves merely a first step and form a stepping stone toward objectives that are more remote. Whereas military and revolutionary actions aim at a physical result, terrorist actions aim at a psychological result.
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> But even that psychological result is not the final goal. Terrorism is violence used in order to create fear; but it is aimed at creating fear in order that the fear, in turn, will lead somebody else—not the terrorist—to embark on some quite different program of action that will accomplish whatever it is that the terrorist really desires.[6]

From this and other conceptual approaches to terrorism, we have drawn together what we see as the essential components of terrorism. Developing these components and then adding their dynamic relationships allows us to build a template that can be applied toward a fuller understanding of today's terrorists and their brands of terrorism.

**Operational Factors**

Operational factors define the group and place it into the world of political violence. "Causes may be broadly conceptualized as any one of an array of observable economic, political, social, and/or psychological factors."[7] Causes are those long-term (social inequities, political disenfranchisement, economic depressions) or short-term (ethnicity, relative deprivation, government repression) conditions that underlie the resort to a strategy of terror.[8] There traditionally have been at least three broad categories: redress

of grievance, overthrow and replacement of the existing government/system, and liberation from "foreign" masters.[9] Today one might add destruction of the existing order to that list at minimum as an intermediate cause. Whatever the specific set of factors behind the strategy, the cause serves as the driving force for recruitment, support, and planning—all of which are sub-elements of structure.

**Figure 2-1: Essential Components of Terrorism**

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| **Operational Factors** |
| Group Type/Cause |
| Group Structure |
| **Tactical Factors** |
| Act |
| Actor |
| Weapon |
| Victim(s) |
| **Strategic Factors** |
| Target of Terror |
| Objective of Terror |
| **Linkage Factors** |
| Operational to Tactical |
| Causal Link/Action |
| Tactical to Strategic |
| Instrumental Link/Fear |

Broadly defined, structure includes a range of subordinate elements essential to carrying out the strategy such as planning, surveillance (intelligence), transportation, papers and identification, arms, money (finance), publicity and propaganda, and command and control as functions of organization.[10] Or "organization provides the formalized structure utilized for the planning, coordination, and application of extranormal forms of political violence."[11] It includes the terrorist political and "military" infrastructures that form the organizational strengths and weaknesses of the strategic and tactical sides of the movement.[12] Taken as a whole, structure is a critical part of the strategy, and it has traditionally provided a central focus for defeating that strategy.

***Group Types/Causes***. A comprehensive analysis of the twenty-first century terrorists and their terrorism must begin with a meaningful grouping of contemporary practitioners. Several insightful observers of terrorism offer their groupings for our evaluation. Bruce Hoffman retains a classical left-right political focus, drawing distinctions between the "old" left and right and their late 1990s mutations. He also gives special attention to ethno-separatist nationalist practitioners of terrorism as the primary actors through the 1980s, and he adds terrorism based on religious imperatives as another categorization deserving of separate attention, particularly in the 1990s. In developing those four categories, he also discusses the issues of state sponsorship, the advent of terrorism "for hire," and the growing trend toward employing amateur terrorists only tangentially attached to the larger group.[13] Hoffman's detailed development of these categories explains historical changes in terrorist goals, motivations, and tactics. We incorporate his insights into a slightly broader framework tailored to the threat to US national security.

Ian Lesser develops a more comprehensive listing, his based on functional and geographic-based terrorist threats to US interests at home and abroad.[14] He projects ethnic separatist and frustrated nationalist threats to the US arising particularly from within successor states to the former Soviet Union. He also sees the increased violence from religious motivated groups as continuing into the foreseeable future. Further, while the ideological groups of the past have waned, Lesser raises the possibility of a re-emergent and invigorated left or a resurgent right engendering new violence. Significantly, Lesser highlights the dangers of terror tactics within an ongoing small-scale contingency or as a carryover by the losing factions from an earlier conflict. He also brings attention to the rising prominence of the violence associated with international crime. Finally, he cites the problem of extreme alienation giving rise to terror attacks. This broader listing, particularly as it is tailored to the threat to US interests, is adapted with input from Hoffman for our use here.

We develop seven categories of groups, regardless of the location of their operations, as representing the broad range of the terrorist threat to US

citizens, territory, and interests. Our first four categories—classical and new left, ethno-separatist/nationalist, religious extremist, and classical and new right—combine elements of Hoffman's central groupings as also reinforced by Lesser. These are the primary group types and causes behind the strategic, political terrorism of most interest to the United States today. The last three are applications of terrorism within another type of strategy—not specifically political—but they threaten US interests, and their strategies are open to a US strategic response.

- *Classical and new left*. Ideological terrorism based on leftist causes was a mainstay of the 1970s and 1980s. RAND data showed that eight of the 11 active international terrorist groups in 1968 were left-wing ideological groups. This number rose to 22 of the 64 groups active in 1980, and it remained at 22 of the 42 active groups in 1992.[15] Significant for these groups, the political cause overshadowed all other factors—they sought to replace the corrupt old order with one of their choosing. Toward that end, classical leftist groups have always tailored their action to appeal to a popular constituency, with their violence thus constrained, choosing symbolic targets and specific armed propaganda operations for mass effects designed to remake the state.[16] The "victory of liberal democracy" that ended the Cold War may have decreased the appeal of such groups, at least temporarily, and the demise of states that supported this form of terrorism has reduced their available resources. The transition, though, to new norms and forms of political and economic order is proving slow and painful, and this might well prepare the ground for a renewal of terrorism from the left, now from a combination of the traditional and an emergent "new" left. This new left, perhaps more international—designed to create an international civil society no longer tied to the state—and less hierarchical in form, will likely still be constrained by an overarching desire to achieve legitimacy.[17]
- *Ethno-nationalist/separatist*. Modern irredentist terrorism rose out of the aftermath of World War II and reached its zenith in the Palestinian groups active in the 1980s. For example, 37 of the 64 international groups active in

1980 were classified as "nationalist/separatist." That figure had declined to 13 of 42 active groups in 1992.[18] However, this brand of terrorism continues as a significant factor in the US threat calculus. These terrorists combine a political objective with ethnic and often religious components, but the political side reigns supreme. They choose symbolic targets to influence both local and international audiences, seeking to embarrass, discredit, and coerce the local government while also gaining their group publicity and support. Gaining and maintaining legitimacy is critical to attaining their goals, so their violence is measured to maintain a socially "tolerable" level and avoid alienation.[19] It is argued that they are most violent early in their existence as they employ violence for hoped for catalytic effects toward a widened conflict and late in a failing cause out of frustration and for revenge. The US may become an attractive revenge target if we have supported the government these groups oppose.[20]

- *Religious extremist*. Terrorism based around religious imperatives is both the oldest and the newest form of terrorism. The modern reincarnation of this historical form arose in the wake of the success of the Iranian Revolution of 1979-1980. RAND recorded no primarily religious terrorist groups in 1968 and only two of 64 in 1980. However, 11 of 42 groups fit this description by 1992, and by 1995 that number was 26 of 56 groups.[21] Significantly, the rise of religious-based terrorism has signaled a shift from violence measured to fit a political agenda to increased lethality associated with a total, holy war.[22] Violence for these groups is legitimized as a sacramental act, even a divine duty, with the believers forming their own—and the only—constituency of interest. The victims and the target are inconsequential outsiders, as are the general mass observers. The constraints placed on the violence of the left and the separatist are gone. Finally, while leftist and separatist terrorism uses violence as a means to affect change in the existing political order, religious extremist terrorism sees violence as a cleansing tool to remove an existing order deemed unfit to rule—or to exist.[23] Data show that while the overall number of incidents has declined as religious-based terrorism has become

prominent, the number of fatalities associated with terrorist acts has risen. For example, in 1995 every act with eight or more fatalities was perpetrated by a religious-based actor.[24]

- *Classical and new right*. While terrorism from the right is not new either, today a new offshoot has emerged out of the religious imperative described above. It is difficult to determine if today the religious imperative is more important than the political cause, but this category is broken out to add focus to the domestic US manifestation of terror based in extreme right-wing politics, racism, and a "transparent veneer of religious precepts."[25] Interestingly, the European variety of right-wing terror matches American political and racist leanings without the religious undertone. In either case, this category of terrorists today employs the most indiscriminate violence, often seeming irrational to general observers. It is, however, not completely indiscriminate or irrational, but is aimed at deliberate intimidation of governments, ethnic and racial groups, and foreign citizens living in the terrorists' homeland.[26] Finally, and significantly for those seeking to thwart such groups and their acts, these groups are both widely dispersed in non-hierarchical but like-minded cells and internationally linked together for information sharing.[27] The Southern Poverty Law Center identified 435 active "Patriot" groups in the US in 1998, as well as 248 "Patriot" Web sites.[28] While not all of these groups advocate violence or racism, they provide a fertile breeding ground for the beliefs that may lead to future terrorist activity.
- *Byproduct of regional conflict (SSC/MTW, past or present)*. The post-Cold War regionalization of conflict has created increased opportunities for states and state-sponsored actors to seek asymmetrical means to attack stronger foes, particularly the United States. While the state strategy here is to defeat the stronger foe or cause it to withdraw its support and presence from a more traditional unconventional or conventional regional conflict, or to retaliate for past involvement in such a conflict, terrorism may be selected as an operational means toward that end. Peter Probst wrote in 1992 that

> One result of the spectacular coalition victory in the Persian Gulf war is that nations opposed to the United States and its coalition partners are significantly less likely to resort again to conventional warfare as a means to advance their foreign policy goals. Rather, there will likely be an increased reliance on indirect forms of aggression, such as terrorism, subversion, insurgency and other forms of low-intensity conflict.[29]

State involvement, either direct or through the use of sponsored surrogates, is an enduring factor in such cases. Again, the terrorism here is within a larger conflict strategy, but the terror and its possible consequences must still pose a significant threat to the United States.

- *Crime, drugs, and privitization of terror*. Similarly, the late 1990s surge in international criminal violence, whether revolving around the drug trade or the wide-ranging enterprises of the underground economy of transitioning eastern Europe, has begun to spill over into the political arena. If the "narco-terrorism" experience is representative, this violence could spawn terrorism directed at United States victims and targets. The "strategy" behind the violence in these cases is the illegal activity and its economic dimension, but the effects must be considered in US policy and strategy.[30]

- *Anarchy and rage*. Finally, as another dimension to the threat to US citizens, property, and interests, we today see instances of "agenda-less" terror—violence perpetrated by independent actors lashing out due to frustration and rage. They see some aspect of the political, social, and/or economic system as responsible for an unacceptable plight, and they reach an as yet not fully understood point where violent destruction is their chosen resort. It will be difficult to anticipate the next Unabomer, or a future abortion clinic attack by a lone actor. As this terror has no strategy behind it, it can only be blocked and its effects mitigated by the macro US strategic response—but it must be considered.[31]

***Group Structures***. The traditional terrorist structure was a hierarchy of small cells, often with only a single link between them—one individual who knew the cell's contact point. This structure lent itself to strong central

control, discipline, and a degree of security for the larger group, if not for each individual cell. That organization scheme, however, is today being replaced with much flatter, much more decentralized networks, sometimes with a single central node, but often with multiple points of interconnectivity so that the group is not dependent on the fate of any one cell. This networked interconnectivity combined with modern telecommunications complicates detectability, allows stand-alone individuals and cells only loosely connected to (and not directed by) more visible groups, and facilitates communication and cooperation between like-minded groups across international borders. It allows small, remote non-state actors to play roles formerly available only to much larger, state-like structures.[32]

This contributes to and reflects what Bruce Hoffman cites as the growing "amateurization" of terrorism—ad hoc amalgamations of like-minded individuals and dispersed, small groups sharing a common cause and mutually reinforcing action without central control. These cells may be indirectly influenced, remotely controlled at best, serving as willing servants, "cut outs," or even dupes for some larger cause. Or they may be simply acting on their cause which is in concert with other groups and their causes—a loose fringe engendered by other terrorist groups or even by more mainstream, legitimate groups espousing a fervent cause. In any case, such groups face fewer constraints than did their centrally connected predecessors, and they complicate detection and countering strategies because they have a much lighter "footprint," using varied tactics and weapons in unpatterned acts of violence.[33]

**Tactical Factors**

Tactical factors focus on the direct elements involved in a given act of terrorism: the terrorist, the weapon, the victim, and the act itself. Terrorist actors are difficult to categorize. While different groups attract or seek to recruit specific segments of society, "All that can be said with any degree of confidence is that terror was (and is) a pursuit of young people, and that in most other respects the differences between terrorists are more pronounced

than the features they may have in common."[34] Today, with the "amateurization" noted above and with criminal elements also employing terror tactics for their ends, categorization is further complicated. Terrorist victims also defy easy categorization. Other than the fact that Americans have traditionally predominated as victims of international terrorism, and that among Americans diplomats, businessmen, and members of the military services have been most at risk, victims have represented a wide range of people and things: men, women, and children; young and old; famous and ordinary; planes, trains, ships, cars, and buildings.

But terrorist weapons and tactics do fit into somewhat predictable patterns, and their use can also be grouped around related acts. They change as terrorists adapt to their successes and failures, but those changes tend to occur over time in identifiable trends, not overnight. Bombs have been the favored mode of attack, ranking highest in terrorist tactics from 1968 through 1994. For example, in 1992 they accounted for almost half of all incidents (46%), and that percentage was stable (between 40 and 50%) since 1968. For that same period, second place went to attacks on installations (by weapons, arson, and sabotage other than bombing) at 22% since 1968. Hijackings were a distant third (12%), with assassinations (6%), and kidnapping (1%) rounding out the top five.[35] Bombings require few people, can be carried out with relatively crude devices, allow the bomber a fair chance to escape prior to detonation, and today can incorporate new and sophisticated explosives, timers, and fuses.[36] These trends may now be changing slightly, however. Bombing began to decline in popularity in the 1990s, falling to 34% of all incidents by 1994 (still the most favored tactic) and to second place at 24% in 1995. Armed attack may be replacing it at the top of the tactical chain, representing its stable 24% of all incidents in 1994, but rising to first place at 44% in 1995. These trends warrant closer scrutiny and analysis to see if they indeed represent a reversal of favored tactics or only a temporary aberration in the larger pattern. By 1995 kidnappings and assassinations remained far

distant third and fourth (14% each), and hijackings had largely dropped from the US radar screen.[37]

Trends in terrorist tactics generally remained unchanged from the 1960s into the 1990s. This led to terrorists being characterized as tactically conservative, despite their radical politics, with an imperative to assure success, even if moderate, over risking tactical innovation. Three significant aspects of the tactical threat are changing today, however, and warrant specific attention. First, and as a basis for the other two trends, is an increasing technical sophistication and operational competence in the late 1990s. Today's terrorists continue to learn from other practitioners of terrorism and adapt new weapons and tactics just as their predecessors did in the past. This is seen by analysts as more a factor of human exploitation of available technologies than as a technologically driven trend. However, coupling new and lethal technologies with more technologically capable terrorists under conditions of less constrained violence creates a volatile danger.[38] This leads to a second changing threat factor that is the increased potentiality for terrorist use of the specific technologies of nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons. Without the political constraints of the old left and traditional irredentist causes, the likelihood of terrorists attempting attacks employing such weapons of mass destruction increases.[39] While the reduction in states supporting terrorism limits the resources available for covert nuclear programs, chemical and biological weapons are relatively cheaper, and could provide the appropriate level of terror. Third, others note movement away from destructive technologies toward tactics of mass disruption, with modern terrorists exploiting information technologies for both tactical offense and defense operations, and for support of their organizations. This has even been tabbed "netwar," and it represents yet another added dimension to the threat.[40] Both mass destruction and mass disruption threats are developed in much greater detail in subsequent chapters of this book.

Thus, the tactical environment and its elements, while not exactly straight forward, are at least well known and studied, and are important in both

responding to an individual act and designing a general response policy. Both investigation and prevention rely heavily on specifics of the tactical environment. Certain groups may prefer particular victims, a particular style of device or type of explosive or weapon, follow a predictable *modus operandi*, or even fit a specific personnel profile. Such characteristics are key to solving a specific criminal incident or seeking to block an identifiable category of attack. With the advent of flatter, non-hierarchical organizations and even loosely linked or unlinked actors, in some cases no such "footprint" may be readily identifiable or predictable. In all cases, however, the larger, strategic environment is central to a broader attempt to understand and defeat the terrorist. "[Terrorism's] success seems to be due in large part to a miscomprehension of the strategy by its opponents. They have neglected the more important of the two levels on which terrorism operates."[41]

**Strategic Factors**

More important, and at the heart of the strategic context we seek to develop, are the strategic factors of target and objective—the real object and rationale of the group and its acts—the "more important of the two levels." Terrorism is designed to evoke a response from the ultimate target of the act, the government or society. The intention may be that the government change its external policy, changing its support to or from a nation or government. Or it may be to discredit the government, graphically demonstrating that it cannot control its territory or protect its citizens, that it cannot govern. It might be to drive a wedge between the government and its people. Or it could be simply to publicize and recruit to a cause. In all of these cases, and more, the act and its victim(s) will be directly or indirectly but symbolically linked to the target, and fear is intended to transfer the effect from the act to the behavior of that target.

Further, terrorism is intended to cause its target to react in a specific way. This is the end goal, the overall objective of the strategy. Government or society must change, and the strategy points directly as a continuum from its root cause toward affecting that change. Government or social reaction—

whether over-reaction, under-reaction, or pointed reaction—is the goal at the output end of the process, and the strategy succeeds or fails only as a function of the direction and degree of the reaction it achieves. Those targets, reactions, and the objectives they seek can be categorized in a variety of ways, with a selected sampling developed below.

***Targets of Terror***. The brief discussion here addresses both direct and indirect targets and victims of terrorism undertaken to impact United States national security. The scope of this discussion is not exhaustive, but is simply representative of the wide range of potential targets and victims. There are four general (macro) categories that encompass the central focus of that range of threat and are considered a comprehensive listing for the purposes of this chapter. First, the United States government continues to represent a primary target of terrorism. As noted earlier, Americans have traditionally predominated as victims of international terrorism, and among Americans, diplomats, businessmen, and members of the military services have been most at risk. This has recently changed slightly, with the 1995 RAND data placing Americans in second place for favored victims that year.[42] It remains to be seen whether this represents a long-term decreasing trend. In fact, given the post-Cold War US global leadership role, United States government presence and policy may become even more prominent targets of international terrorism attacks both abroad and at home. Second, US business has been and will continue to be a popular target of terrorism. As the globalization of the world economy continues, US business presence and influence will become increasingly visible and vulnerable. Third, the United States public is also an attractive target of terrorism. The leading roles of the US government and of US business combine with the centrality of Hollywood and Madison Avenue in global commercial media to highlight the US citizenry and public opinion as primary targets of terrorism. Finally, international systemic institutions and stability are of central importance to United States interests, and thus present attractive terror targets.

Within each of these categories, there could be both direct and indirect targets and victims of terrorism. This underscores again the prevalence of symbolic links from cause to motive to victim to target and objective—this symbolic tie is a key (along with the terrorists' objectives) to understanding both the act and the strategy behind terrorism. As such, this symbolic linkage is a central element in terrorism threat analysis and response planning. Finally, note that there is today a cascading of multiple possible victims, particularly directly linked victims in each of the four general target categories. The wide scope and prevalence of United States presence, power, and visibility throughout the entire world guarantees this abundance of potential victims and, to terrorists, lucrative targets. This demonstrates the extent of symbolic linkages that are possible while also pointing out how much this can complicate terrorism analysis and planning to combat terrorism today.

***Objectives of Terror***. John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini develop terrorist paradigms that imply instrumental objectives. For example, in developing their Coercive-Diplomacy Paradigm, they state "From its earliest days, terrorism has often sought to persuade others, by means of symbolic violence, either to do something, stop doing something, or undo what has been done." This is a listing of instrumental objectives. Similarly, their War Paradigm implies a goal of inflicting damage within a "war," an asymmetrical strategic battle of the weak against a much stronger foe. Finally, New-World Paradigm terrorism seeks destruction toward societal disruption, leading to the replacement of the current order with one the terrorist prefers.[43] These three paradigms form a useful typology, but it requires a good deal of interpretation to flesh out key factors and consequences of terrorism from this categorization alone.

Bruce Hoffman suggests five sequential objectives of terrorism: attention, acknowledgement, recognition, authority, and governance. According to this typology, terrorism first seeks publicity for its cause (attention), then it seeks to legitimate that cause in the eyes of the target public (acknowledgement), and it follows that legitimization by seeking the status of

representation for its chosen constituency (recognition). Hoffman notes that while terrorist groups have on occasion reached those three stages, few have attained the final two. These are the award of a seat at the political table in an official capacity (authority), and control of the target political apparatus (governance).[44] According to our categorization, the reactions and objectives sought by political, strategic terrorism are more pointed to Hoffman's first three stages and more broadly will generally fall under one of the following: Recognition, Intimidation, Coercion, or Provocation.[45] We see these objectives as sometimes singular and sometimes simultaneous, and not necessarily sequential. Each is detailed below.

- *Recognition.* Recognition is important for all terrorist groups. They seek to publicize and legitimize their cause, and a terrorist incident guarantees immediate news coverage. A terrorist incident will draw attention to a particular issue and perhaps galvanize the general public to support the organization's cause. Incident timing and the specific victim/nature of the act is often tailored to "get the message across." For the terrorist, the media is a critical tool for getting his message out—a violent act guarantees media coverage. Media is business, and news organs will give their attention to stories that attract viewers or readers. As one observer commented, "nothing is so newsworthy as violence."[46] There is also a concern that if they do not give coverage to incidents, terrorism will escalate in violence until the media finally gives in. Ultimately, even the threat of violence can lead to publicity for the terrorist cause.

Terrorists also require funds and recruits, guns and materials, logistics and support. Often they seek recognition directly in support of building and sustaining their infrastructure. Robbing banks or armories, seeking publicity for recruitment as well as to further their political cause, terrorists often undertake fairly "normal" criminal acts to secure this essential support. This can be a point of vulnerability for the group, and criminal patterns should be monitored to track terrorist cycles of infrastructure building.

- *Intimidation.* When organizations find they lack public support, they may turn to terrorist activities as a means to frighten society to act in a specific way. This is the "terror" in terrorism. The target in this case is the population as a whole, with their fear and anxiety designed to force the government or the economic system to make the changes proposed by the terrorists. Terrorists might choose as victims only those segments of the population that are linked to their cause. For instance, left-wing groups might initiate a bombing or assassination campaign against financial or industrial leaders, and "ecoterrorists" often focus their attacks on developers and the timber industry.
- *Coercion.* A group may try to coerce the government into taking certain actions in an attempt to bring about societal changes. Terrorist incidents with coercion as the objective are quickly followed by specific demands and threats of further violence. Kidnappings and hijackings are popular tactics here because they provide the terrorists with bargaining chips and hold the possibility of being resolved without permanent injury to the victims. Such activities are often conducted in response to government actions—"revenge" by a terrorist group is primarily a means of encouraging the government not to repeat an action.

Civilian casualties are an important consideration of coercion. Terrorists realize that their demands may be lost in the confusion that would follow an incident like the destruction of Pan Am Flight 103 or the bombing of the World Trade Center. They must consider that civilian causalities may anger the public and lead to demands for government retaliation. Public officials would be less likely to negotiate with a group that committed such an act. The power, then, lies more in the threat of violence than in violence itself. For this reason, events such as kidnappings and hijackings, small-scale actions such as assassinations, and acts of violence which appear random but which cause few, if any injuries, are more likely to be perpetrated by groups that see coercion of the government as their goal.

In the face of today's terrorism—particularly that associated with religious extremism and tactical terrorism from larger-scale conflicts,

terrorism as a spill-over from international criminal activities, and the terrorism of anarchy and rage—*retribution* may be added as an adjunct operational reality to the strategic objectives of intimidation and coercion listed above. Since violence is essentially a tool for achieving a goal, and since retribution in and of itself does not advance a cause, we specifically do not suggest it as a strategic objective of terrorist violence, but rather as a related factor for violence that is designed to achieve either *coercion* or *intimidation*. In all cases, governments need to recognize the objective(s) behind the action because the entire cause-to-objective chain might then be evident, allowing the response to focus directly at the terrorist strategy. Governments need to understand the interactive linkages from the ultimate objective of the specific group and its cause to motive for the act and generator of instrumental fear pointed at the act's target.

- *Provocation.* Another means of increasing support for a cause is to decrease support for the government. Terrorists may commit acts designed to provoke the government into a response that will be resented by members of the public. Warrantless searches, roadblocks, repressive measures against civilians—all of these can reduce the trust people have in their government, leading to acceptance of the terrorist perspective as the more attractive alternative. Provocation can best be accomplished by attacking the government directly and inflicting significant damage/casualties on it. The hope is that there will be some within government who will seek revenge against the terrorists, and their response may have an impact on innocent, law-abiding civilians. As Fromkin wrote "Brutality is an induced governmental response . . . that has enabled terrorist strategies to succeed in many situations. . . ."[47]

**Linkage Factors**

Most significant are the linkage factors. As Bruce Hoffman puts it, "All terrorists seek targets that are rewarding from their point of view, and employ tactics that are consonant with their overriding political aims."[48] It is these linkages that add the dynamics to terrorism, linking political cause to

destructive action and further linking that destruction to its broader target and intended effect. The key linkage to the tactical environment, the linchpin that activates the strategy into an act of terrorism, is cause to action. It is here that an individual or group chooses to carry out specific acts of violence in support of the strategy. This linkage translates cause into action, and it applies the organization at the tactical level, indicating the short-term level of popular support, recruitment, and operational capabilities. Just as causes are varied and organizations range from simple to complex, action motivation is difficult to generalize. "Any explanation that attempts to account for all its [terrorism's] many manifestations is bound to be either exceedingly vague or altogether wrong."[49] Context is the answer here, and it is the principal contribution of the strategic perspective. The broad context, the strategic environment, holds the answers to most questions about who, how, and why terrorism exists and operates at a given place and time.

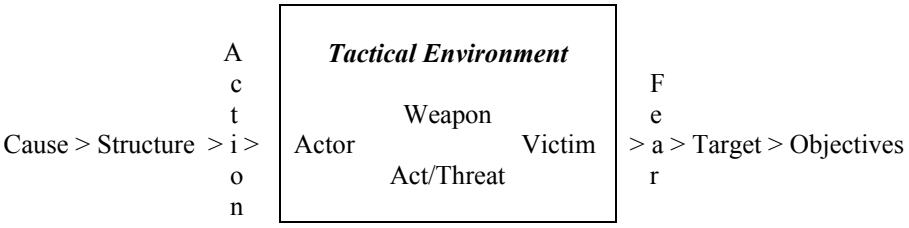
The linchpin on the output side of the act is fear—the psychological effect and the critical dynamic of the terror. It too must be analyzed within the strategic context of terrorism. Strategic terrorism is, at base, an extreme form of psychological warfare, and the broader fear engendered by the act lends its ultimate credibility. The means are justified by the ends, and the end is that the target reacts due to fear.[50] Adding in these linkages adds dynamic interactions across all of the essential components, and it is this dynamic presentation of terrorism at the millennium that we now examine.

**Terrorism Dynamics**

These essential components can be viewed in their dynamic interactions as depicted at Figure 2-2. The value of examining the components as they interact is that it underscores the analytical value of examining terrorism not simply as a tactic or an isolated incident but as a strategic threat within a strategic context. That full context enables the analyst to fit known details—of the group and its cause, a specific threatened target, an individual act—against other critical components to provide understanding, warning, response planning, and policy options. It highlights and relates both knowns

and unknowns, allowing both forward and back mapping across the components to broaden understanding and, perhaps most importantly, to indicate the right questions to ask to fill in the critical blanks toward full understanding and effective response.

**Figure 2-2: Terrorism Dynamics**[51]

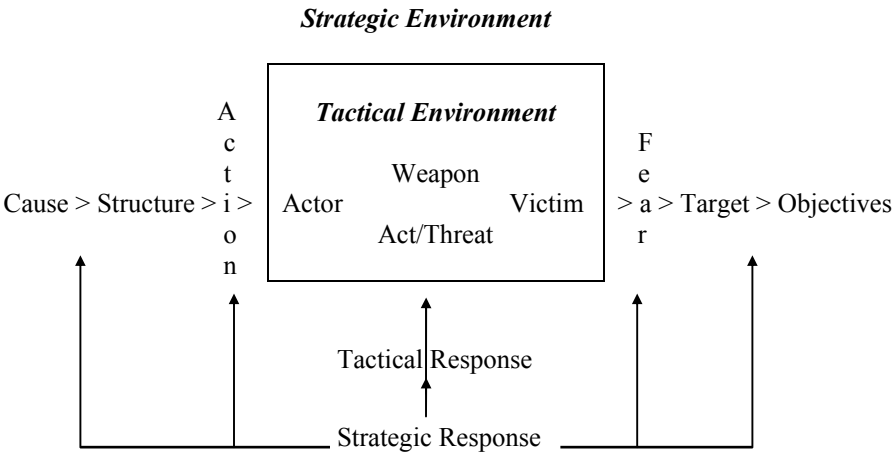



While terrorism is anything but linear in any of its complex dimensions, the essential components are related in linear fashion here for ease of explanation. Moving from left to right across the components as depicted here, one begins with the operational factors of group type/cause and structure. The different types of groups, whose causes were developed in some detail earlier in the chapter, adopt their own organizational characteristics. These operational factors, cause and structure, mark each type of group as somewhat unique, and they provide the will and capability components behind any given act. This combination of will and capability, then, provides the link that enables the terrorist action. Within the tactical environment, the component actor and weapon proceed directly from the operational factors—the group's recruitment, training, weapons preferences, experience, availability, etc. And the chosen act and victim are symbolically linked back to cause, as well as being dependent on the capabilities of the terrorist actor and the available or chosen weapon. Further, the entirety of the tactical components—actor, act, weapon, and victim—are specifically designed to generate fear that will instrumentally affect a strategic target or targets toward the furtherance of a strategic objective. That fear adds the element of intent to the picture, and the

all-encompassing linkages are clear—from cause all the way through to objective and back again.

This representation of the interactive essential components allows general terrorism analysis and understanding, it provides a systematic structure to analyzing acts after they occur, and it facilitates analysis before-the-fact as an element of policy planning. However, again, the broader strategic context is needed to relate the individual components and bits of information into a coherent whole. Whether from the left or right, at home or abroad, it allows the analyst to understand the terrorist's strategy so that it can be countered with an effective strategic response.

**Figure 2-3: Strategic Responses to the Terrorist Threat**




The same essential components along with their dynamic interactions indicate points of attack for an effective response strategy. These components and the dynamics between them not only define the terrorist group, its critical characteristics, and its operational, tactical, and strategic dimensions. They also point to its relative strengths and weaknesses, indicating potential response strategies to effectively counter key strengths and to capitalize on weaknesses. The terrorist can be blunted, his damage prevented or limited, by tactical response policy elements. And he can be preempted or deterred—even defeated—by strategic countermeasures that target and attack his operational

and strategic nodes. The strategic context, then, with its essential elements developed and related within an overarching strategic perspective, is at the center of both terrorism threat and response. It provides the template for a comprehensive threat assessment, and it provides the framework for systematic response policy planning.

## Terrorism in Its Strategic Context: One Example

This chapter has presented the argument for such a strategic approach to terrorism—specifically for viewing contemporary terrorism within its strategic context so that all of its key elements are examined, related, and considered in formulating an effectively designed and targeted strategic response. That context, while largely developed from lessons learned in viewing "traditional" terrorism, remains applicable in slightly broadened or altered application to the "new" terrorism of the early 21st century. Now, in this final section of the chapter, we briefly discuss one case within that context to highlight the necessity and utility of this approach in analyzing the contemporary terrorism threat and planning policy in response.

The case briefly summarized here is that of Aum Shinrikyo, the group that undertook a Sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system in March 1995. It is selected as representative of elements of the "new" terrorism and is developed within the strategic context presented here.[52]

### Operational Factors

A central defining characteristic of the “new” terrorism is the appearance of religious extremism as a primary causal factor behind terrorist activity. In fact, some would argue that religious motivations have supplanted political causes as the *raison d’être* of modern terrorism. We see, however, a combination of religious and political threads intertwining at the heart of Aum.

Aum Shinrikyo represents the range of “new religions,” hybrids of traditional elements of Buddhism and either other traditional religions or unique mixes of religious or philosophical tenets, that are fairly common in modern Japan. Aum took on an apocalyptic dimension centered on the belief that an eventual conflict would destroy the current organizing structures in

Japan and elsewhere, leaving a political and social void to be filled by chaos until an intellectual and organizational force could assert itself to create a new societal order. Aum, then, on surface blended hybrid Buddhist tenets upon a foundation of apocalyptic vision. However, in anticipation of the need to step into the post-apocalyptic void, Aum maintained a very political core. The inner cadre of Aum leadership was organized into a "shadow government," with a structure directly mirroring Japan's executive department and functions. Individual Aum leaders were assigned positions to prepare to assume those duties in the new order. Aum also ran, albeit unsuccessfully, a slate of candidates for seats in the Japanese Diet.

So Aum blended the "new" religious motivation to action with the political core that has characterized "traditional" terrorism. Their preparedness to assume governmental function blended with absolute opposition to the existing government to inspire preparation for violent action to accelerate or augment the coming apocalypse and to protect the group until that day arrived. Aum developed hierarchical "operational" organs, a highly sophisticated infrastructure, and extensive support mechanisms. Using the broader religious periphery for first-level recruitment and basic funding, Aum developed business enterprises and internally selected technical expertise to support its action program. These eventually included both conventional and chemical/biological weapons labs derived from legitimate cover enterprises, and the Aum weapons program was ultimately as well financed and technically supported as many smaller government programs.

**Tactical Factors**

While Aum in the early 1990s was a broad-based and large, horizontal religious movement, it contained a very vertically stratified and tightly disciplined action cadre at its political center. The several violent actions carried out by the Aum cadre look much like traditional terrorism—the same individuals involved in planning and executing the acts, this group acting in close concert with an equally small and disciplined direct support cadre, all under the direct control of the central leadership of the group.

Aum's initial employments of chemical weapons were a mix of experimental and operational action. They chose an initial victim based on direct operational significance, but they experimented with field application of their chemical weapons—in the end unsuccessfully when their effort to create a gaseous form of Sarin in the field resulted in their dispersal van catching fire. However, Aum continued with its reliance on chemical attack as their primary form of action, probably to both exploit their economic and technical capabilities in this arena and to further their end goal of creating broader effects from their action that would hasten the ultimate global conflict to usher in their rise to power. Toward this end, Aum was certainly willing to accept mass casualties, but their continuing problems with dispersal and application present a significant lesson caveat to be added to discussions of the "new" terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. Aum, in spite of its level of funding, expertise, and technical facilities and support was not able to master the employment of this class of weapons. Effective employment of WMD is not simple, nor can it be assumed to be inevitable. Perhaps more primitive application methods are best suited to such groups, at least in the near term.

**Strategic Factors**

In terms of victims and targets, Aum progressed from direct attacks on victims-as-targets to victims as symbolically linked to their actual target. For Aum's first (and ultimately failed) Sarin attack, the intended victim was the leader of a rival "new religion" and his followers and audience. The target of the fear to be generated by this attack was the followers of this rival group and any other citizens who represented potential recruitment targets of the messages advanced by the new religious sects—many of whom were conceivably in the audience and thus also intended victims of the attack. This connection of victims and targets is closer to pure criminality than to what we view as terrorism; however, this attack appears to have been as much about field testing the Sarin and its dispersal system as it was about the root cause of Aum. Intimidation to enhance future infrastructure development was the goal.

The second Sarin attack (also less than fully successful) was intended to kill three judges who were presiding at a trial involving Aum. The attack was planned to gas the judges, their courthouse, and an adjacent police station—again a victims-as-target attack against the direct, localized component of the justice system registering a threat to Aum. Poor planning caused the attack team to arrive after the judges had left the courthouse, and the subsequent shift to attack their apartment complex failed when the gas dispersed too widely to affect the specific apartments of interest. Direct intimidation for self-protection and enhancement was again the goal.

Finally, the Tokyo subway attack represents the ultimate application of terrorism for the purpose of intimidation toward self-preservation. Japanese national police under the Ministry of Justice had amassed sufficient evidence to mount a raid on the Aum compound and chemical weapons laboratory. The attack employed unsophisticated dispersal following the earlier failures—plastic bags of liquid Sarin punctured by the pointed ends of umbrellas. And even though the operation involved rush-hour attacks on five separate subway trains in the Tokyo system, those five particular trains were all due to arrive at Kasumigaseki station shortly before eight o'clock on a weekday morning. This station services the Ministry of Justice headquarters, and the timing would have meant that many of the passengers on those trains would have been Justice employees.

**Linkage Factors**

The linkages then are fairly clear. In terms of instrumental linkages from action to objectives via the generation of fear, the pattern is consistent during this early operational/growth phase of development of Aum as a terrorist group. Aum felt that its legally protected religious status under Japanese law was threatened, as well as its growing weapons program and its ultimate aim of fomenting apocalyptic violence. It used terrorist action to both directly and indirectly affect the sources of the threat. Eventually, the group planned to employ broader, mass-casualty attacks to precipitate the envisioned apocalypse and facilitate its rise to societal power.

The direct action link was the threat to growth prospects posed by a rival religious group, and more importantly the threat of legal and police action to their protected religious status, their weapons program, and to the freedom of their action cadre. These were, however, second-order action links. The initiation of the Aum weapons program came as a result of the Aum leadership's reaction to the overwhelming conventional military superiority demonstrated by the United States military in the Gulf War in 1991. They no longer believed that global Armageddon would result in the fall of existing governments—they now feared US hegemony, and they felt entirely impotent in the face of American power. Weapons of mass destruction, then, were not selected simply to cause massive casualties. They were chosen as a necessary capability in the face of overwhelming comparative weakness. The religious and apocalyptic rationale justified the level of potential casualties, but operational considerations drove the decision to develop and eventually to employ these weapons.

Thus the Aum Shinrikyo case presents a mix of "new" and "traditional" terrorism—new structures and tactics overlaid on familiar patterns from the 1970s. The strategic context and its essential components presented here continue to provide analytical keys to understanding, and we argue to unraveling, strategies of terrorism. The strategic framework presented here, then, appears to bridge from its traditional base into the new manifestations of terrorism that presents threats to United States citizens, interests, and property today. It warrants continued investigation and application to better validate its relevance to 21st century terrorism.

**Implications for Strategy and Policy**

"Terrorism wins only if you respond to it in the way that the terrorists want you to; . . . its fate is in your hands and not in theirs."[53] Terrorists adapt and improve—they learn—and the US government must also learn, adapt, and improve to effectively combat and respond to terrorism today. The first step, we maintain, is to firmly establish terrorism within its strategic context, for

only then can you fully appreciate the totality of the strategy of terrorism and formulate an effective strategic response.

The world—and specifically the United States government—has endured three decades of modern political terrorism, calculated violence applied toward coercive intimidation or provocation. Terrorist violence is applied for its psychological effects; to employ fear to ultimately force a government to react in some manner designed to further the terrorists' ends. Today's "new" political terrorism has found its way onto US soil, but the international experience can help defeat it before it finds deeper roots here. Experience stresses that terrorism be viewed as a process, one linking the terrorist cause and organization via motivation to the violent action, and linking that action via societal fear to its real target, the government, in order to achieve its desired political objective through government action or inaction. The process perspective based in the strategic context of terrorism also indicates the utility and necessity of a strategic response—one targeted not just at the bomber, bomb, and victim, but at the cause-to-victim-to-objective chain. A strategy of terrorism demands a strategic response, a strategy that must be proactive, comprehensive, and integrated to win.

> By itself, as has been said, terror can accomplish nothing in terms of political goals; it can only aim at obtaining a response that will achieve those goals for it.
> . . . The important point is that the choice is yours. That is the ultimate weakness of terrorism as a strategy. It means that, though terrorism cannot always be prevented, it can always be defeated. You can always refuse to do what they want you to do.[54]

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[1] For the most comprehensive review of terrorism definitions, see Alex P. Schmid, Albert J. Jongman, et al, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories, and Literature* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1988).

[2] Paul Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State* 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 51, uses the term "coercive intimidation;" Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977), 81, lends the concept "provocation."

[3] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 43.

[4.] Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 5-7; and Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, 51.

[5.] Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 7.

[6] David Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," *Foreign Affairs* 53 (July 1975): 692-693.

[7] Richard Shultz, "Conceptualizing Political Terrorism," in Charles W. Kegley, Jr., ed., *International Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 48.

[8] Shultz, "Conceptualizing Political Terrorism," 48.

[9.] Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 79.

[10.] Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 84-96.

[11.] Shultz, "Conceptualizing Political Terrorism," 49.

[12.] G. Davidson Smith, *Combatting Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 1990), 15-20.

[13] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*.

[14] Ian O. Lesser, "Countering the New Terrorism: Implications for Strategy," in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 85-144.

[15] Bruce Hoffman, "Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6 (Autumn 1994).

[16] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 158-160.

[17] Brad Roberts, "CBW Terrorism: Calibrating Risks and Responses," Air War College briefing slides.

[18] Hoffman, "Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum."

[19] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 161-162.

[20] Lesser, "Countering the New Terrorism," 100.

[21] Bruce Hoffman, "Terrorism Trends and Prospects," in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, *Countering the New Terrorism* (RAND, 1999), 16.

[22] Lesser, "Countering the New Terrorism," 101.

[23] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 84.

[24] Bruce Hoffman, "Old Madness, New Methods: Revival of Religious Terrorism Begs for Broader U.S. Policy," *RAND Review* (Winter 1998-99): 14-15.

[25] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 111.

[26] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 164-166.

[27] Roberts, "CBW Terrorism;" and Lesser, "Countering the New Terrorism," 104.

[28] Southern Poverty Law Center, "Active Patriot Groups in 1998," *Intelligence Report* 94 (Spring 1999): 28-35.

[29] Peter Probst, "Spectre of the 1990s," *Defense 92* (Jan/Feb 1992): 21.

[30] See Lesser, "Countering the New Terrorism," 105-108, for a more extended discussion of this threat.

[31] Again, Lesser, "Countering the New Terrorism," 109-110, includes a slightly broader discussion of this threat.

[32] John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, "Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism," in Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, *Countering the New Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1999), 39-84.

[33] Hoffman, "Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum."

[34] Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 120.

[35] Hoffman, "Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum," 2-4.

[36] Hoffman, "Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum,"

3-5, 15-18.

[37] Bruce and Donna Kim Hoffman, "The Rand-St. Andrews Chronology of International Terrorist Incidents, 1995," 87, 95.

[38] Hoffman, “Responding to Terrorism Across the Technological Spectrum.”

[39] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 196-205. See also Richard A. Falkenrath, Robert D. Newman, and Bradley A. Thayer, *America’s Achilles’ Heel: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Terrorism and Covert Attack* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

[40] Arquilla, Ronfeldt, and Zanini, “Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism.”

[41] Fromkin, “The Strategy of Terrorism,” 696.

[42] Hoffman and Hoffman, "The Rand-St. Andrews Chronology of International Terrorist Incidents, 1995," 88.

[43] Arquilla, Ronfeldt, and Zanini, “Networks, Netwar, and Information-Age Terrorism.” The quote is from page 68.

[44] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 183-184.

[45.] CSM James J. Gallagher (USA, ret), *Low-Intensity Conflict* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1992), 79-81, lists and defines Recognition, Intimidation, Coercion, Provocation, and Insurgency Support as terrorist objectives. We see insurgency support as a tactical objective, with contemporary anti-US terrorism within larger conflicts aimed toward a broader strategic end. See William C. Thomas, "Understanding the Objectives of Terrorism: A Key Analytical Tool," *American Intelligence Journal* (Spring 1996). Thomas adapts Gallagher's categories, providing his own descriptions that are much closer to those used here.

[46.] Richard Clutterbuck, *Protest and the Urban Guerilla* (London: Castle and Co., 1973), 245.

[47.] Fromkin, “The Strategy of Terrorism,” 687

[48] Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism,* 157.

[49.] Laqueur, *Terrorism*, 133.

[50.] Wilkinson, *Terrorism and the Liberal State*, 55-56.

[51] This dynamic conceptualization of terrorism is from James M. Smith and William C. Thomas, "The Real Threat From Oklahoma City: Tactical and Strategic Responses to Terrorism," *Journal of Conflict Studies* XVII (Spring 1998): 119-138.

[52] Case details are based on D.W. Brackett, *Holy Terror: Armageddon in Tokyo* (New York: Weatherhill, 1996), and US Senate Government Affairs Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, *Global Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Case Study of Aum Shinrikyo* (Washington DC: GPO, 1995).

[53] Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," 697.

[54] Fromkin, "The Strategy of Terrorism," 689, 697.